

**TESTIMONY OF THE VILLAGE FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN**  
**On the Governor's Proposed Biennial Budget**

**Appropriations Committee**

February 27, 2015

Submitted by Galo A. Rodriguez, MPH

Good afternoon Senator Bye, Representative Walker and members of the Appropriations Committee.

I am the President and CEO of The Village for Families and Children, a 200-year-old nonprofit dedicated to transforming the lives of vulnerable children and youth in Connecticut.

I am testifying today to implore the committee to reconsider the Governor's proposed biennial budget. According to a report by Connecticut Voices, Governor Dannel Malloy's state budget proposal unfairly balances the budget on the backs of children and families. While spending on the "Children's Budget" – state government spending that directly benefits young people – makes up only a third of the overall state budget, **over half (54%) of the Governor's proposed cuts come from children's programs.**

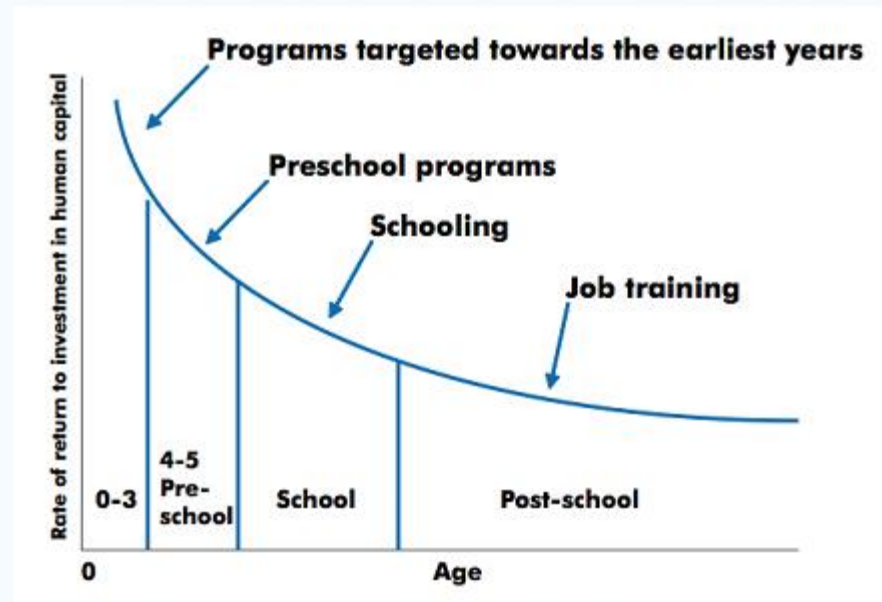
Among the most concerning is the proposed cut to Medicaid rates. These cuts would target the earliest points of intervention for children who are struggling to succeed, such as children's mental health programs. The plan would cut reimbursement to health care providers who treat Medicaid patients, a \$107.5 million reduction in payments in the next fiscal year. This huge cut in the services delivery system would only save the state \$43 million because the federal government reimburses the state for a portion of its Medicaid payments. These types of cuts are bad public policy.

Another proposal that would have a devastating effect on children in Connecticut is the elimination of the "Help Me Grow" program. This program was developed by the Connecticut Children's Medical Center's office of Community Health and is being replicated nationally because of the outcomes it has achieved. Help Me Grow ensures that parents with concerns about their young child's development have one place to go to get information and access services they need.

Some of these young children are born with low birth weight or are at risk for poor developmental and behavioral outcomes due to an accumulation of factors known as "toxic stress." These factors include poverty, child abuse and neglect, domestic and community violence, caregiver depression and substance abuse, homelessness, health problems, and barriers to care. The damaging effects of toxic stress are cumulative and lead to major developmental and mental health problems, substance abuse, cognitive disability, and physical illness which last throughout the lifespan. Research shows that 80% of brain growth is completed by three years of age and toxic stress from sustained and aggregated adverse experiences has been shown to impact the brain and impair developmental and behavioral functioning. The older the child, the more difficult it is to change brain structure, the greater the expense, and the poorer the outcome [See Figure 1 – indicate source].

## Figure 1a Returns to a Unit Dollar Invested

(a) Return to a unit dollar invested at different ages from the perspective of the beginning of life, assuming one dollar initially invested at each age



Cutting *Help Me Grow* is bad public policy. Programs like *Help Me Grow* that target at-risk young children and their families in the early years promote the healthy growth and development of children, which leads to academic success, economic productivity, good health and healthy relationships later in life. The smartest investments occur at the earliest possible point in a child's life.

At The Village our 400 plus employees come to work every day to ensure that every child believes in tomorrow. We hope that the Committee feels the same way, and will do whatever it takes to ensure that our public policy enables that to happen.

Respectfully submitted,

Galo Rodriguez

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